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FM THE SITUATION ROOM TOHAK 17
TO WINSTON LORD FOR HENRY KISSINGER
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ROWLAND EVANS AND ROBERT NOAK

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

NIXONIAN ALOOFNESS: 'THE NATIONAL HONOR IS AT STAKE'

IN HIS CLOSED-DOOR MEETING WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS FRIDAY MORNING, PRESIDENT NIXON MADE PERFECTLY CLEAR THAT HE WILL NOT BE STOPPED FROM PURSUING THE VIETNAM WAR IN HIS OWN FASHION, WITHOUT INTERFERENCE EITHER FROM CAPITAL HILL OR THE NORTH VIETNAMESE POLITBURE.

THIS TOUGH MESSAGE, JUST TWO WEEKS BEFORE WHAT SHOULD BE A TRIUMPHANT INAUGURATION, LEFT EVEN SOME REPUBLICAN LEADERS DISMAYED, DISCONCERTED AND UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SADDENED: MR. NIXON HAD FAILED TO EXPLAIN THE LATE-DECEMBER BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM.

THE PRESIDENT WAS ACTING IN SUPREME CONFIDENCE THAT, CONTRARY TO MANY REPORTS, THE COUNTRY IS BEHIND HIM AND CONGRESS WILL NOT ACTUALLY VOTE AGAINST THAT PUBLIC OPINION. HIS HOPE: HIS HARD STAND WITH CONGRESS WILL BE DULY NOTED IN HANOI, PAYING OFF IN AN EARLY SETTLEMENT

OF FRIDAY'S 90-MINUTE MEETING, THEN LEFT THE ROOM WITHOUT INVITING QUESTIONS. HE OPENED WITH A PROMISE TO EXPLAIN HIS SUDDEN DECISION TO UNLEASH THE HEAVIEST BOMBING OF THE WAR DEC 18, WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION WITH CONGRESS. BUT HE FAILED TO RETURN TO THE SUBJECT.

THUS, MR. NIXON LEFT HIS AUDIENCE UNSATISFIED. REITERATING THAT "NATIONAL HONOR" WAS AT STAKE IN THE MANNER PEACE IS FINALLY ACHIEVED, MR. NIXON THEN PROMISED THAT IF HENRY KISSINGER'S CURRENT ROUND OF TALKS IN PARIS IS SUCCESSFUL, A "GENERATION OF PEACE" WORLDWIDE WOULD BE ASSURED.

HE TREATED THE GRANDEES OF CONGRESS WITH TYPICALLY NIXONIAN ALOOFNESS, REVEALING NO NEW GLIMMER OF SECRETS ON LAST MONTH'S NEGOTIATING DEADLOCK AT PARIS WHICH LED TO HIS FIRST-EVER USE OF B-52 BOMBERS OVER HANOI AND HAIPHONG. CONTRARY TO PUBLIC SPECULATION THAT CONGRESS IS ABOUT TO STRIP HIM OF WAR-MAKING POWER, HE WAS SAYING IN EFFECT: THESE NEGOTIATIONS ARE MY BUSINESS, NOT YOURS, AND YOU DO NOT POSSESS THE POWER TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

THERE IS EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THAT CONFIDENCE. MR. NIXON HAS BEEN STUDYING SECRET WHITE HOUSE POLLS SHOWING ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF THE COUNTRY EITHER BACKED HIS BOMBING OF MILITARY TARGETS IN NORTH VIETNAM'S POPULATED CITIES OR DID NOT CARE.

MORE TO THE POINT, THE PRESIDENT IS CONVINCED THAT, DESPITE LAST WEEK'S OVERWHELMING MAJORITIES IN THE SENATE AND HOUSE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUSES SUPPORTING A CONGRESSIONAL BAN ON THE WAR, THERE IS NO CHANCE CONGRESS CAN FORCE HIS HAND FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS.

FOR THE PRESIDENT, IT IS IMMENSELY IMPORTANT TO IMPRESS THAT FACT ON LE DUC THO, KISSINGER'S OPPOSITE NUMBER AT PARIS, AND ON THE HANOI POLITBURO.

IT IS TAKEN AS FACT IN THE WHITE HOUSE THAT A MAJOR EXPLANATION OF HANOI'S SUDDEN PROCRASTINATION ON THE LAST ROUND OF PARIS TALKS TO POSTPONE SETTLEMENT UNTIL THE NEW CONGRESS CONVENED. PRESSURE FROM ANTI-WAR DOVES WHO DOMINATE THE MAJORITY DEMOCRATS WOULD FORCE THE PRESIDENT INTO NEW CONCESSIONS

WAS JUST ONE MORE WAY OF CONVEYING TO HANOI HIS REFUSAL TO BE ENTICED INTO A PARTNERSHIP-NEGOTIATION, WITH CONGRESS KIBITZING IN THE GAME OVER THE PRESIDENT'S SHOULDER. AN EARLIER WAY WAS HIS REFUSAL TO EXPLAIN THE BOMBING DECISION EITHER TO CONGRESS OR TO THE COUNTRY, AS HE HAD PUBLICLY EXPLAINED BOTH THE 1970 CAMBODIAN INVASION AND LAST SPRING'S DARING DECISION TO MINE HAIPHONG HARBOR.

THE MESSAGE SEEMS TO BE GETTING THROUGH TO HANOI THAT CONGRESS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO IMPOSE ITS WILL ON THE WHITE HOUSE.

IF CONGRESS SHOULD SEND THE PRESIDENT A BILL CUTTING OFF ALL FUNDS FOR U.S. PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR OR AID TO SAIGON, HE WOULD VETO IT. IF CONGRESS SHOULD ATTACH SUCH A PROVISIO TO AN APPROPRIATION BILL FOR EXAMPLE, TO CONTINUE FOREIGN AID SPENDING DUE TO EXPIRE FEB. 28-HE WOULD VETO THAT, TOO, AND THEN CHALLENGE CONGRESS TO LET FOREIGN AID DIE OR SEND HIM A NEW BILL.

MOREOVER, KEY PRESIDENTIAL

AIDES ARE CONVINCED THAT IN ANY TOE-TO-TOE BATTLE WITH THE DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS, MR. NIXON COULD TAKE HIS CASE TO THE COUNTRY AND WIN IT.

IF KISSINGER OBTAINS A SETTLEMENT WITHIN THE NEXT THREE WEEKS IN PARIS, THIS CLASH BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESS WILL DIE ABORNING. IF NOT, MR. NIXON'S SECOND TERM WILL BEGIN AN EMBITTERED AND POTENTIALLY HISTORIC STRUGGLE FOR WHICH THE PRESIDENT IS FAR BETTER ARMED THAN THE CONGRESS, CONSIDERING HIS VETO POWER AND HIS POPULAR SUPPORT.

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